

The Hamilton Conference Broadside

While we were limited in our ability to create this broadside in the exact methods that would have been employed by a printer in Hamilton's time, we did our best to remain loyal to the true art of printing as we engaged technologies that developed over a two hundred year history.

The broadside was produced by the Hamilton College Library in the fine art of letterpress printing and is limited to an edition of seventy-five copies. Letterpress, one of the oldest forms of printing, revolutionized by Johann Gutenberg in the 15th century, remained economically viable until the 1960's when advances in light sensitive materials made photocomposition more productive in the same way today's advancements in the computer are replacing photocomposition with digital production.

The type employed in this work includes a handset antique foundry Baskerville, Monotype composed Van Dijck and Cloister Black. It required over two hours of casting time, and several hours of hand composition to transform the seven individual ornaments into the pattern that is the border.

Baskerville is named after its creator, John Baskerville, an eccentric and innovative eighteenth-century English businessman. Having amassed a fortune in the manufacture of japanned ware, his ambition, like other renaissance printers, was to design his own typeface and print magnificent editions of great literary works in which to put artistic vision, taste, and principle, above economics. In 1750 Baskerville began the creation of his own, newly designed typeface. Baskerville's crisp presswork, his clean, simple, an impeccable typography, and particularly, his new, open and graceful typeface soon amazed critics. Once relatively unknown, he became the father of fine book printing in England. Sadly, however, booksellers and commercial printers of the day were not interested in Baskerville's new typeface and methods. Discouraged, Baskerville abandoned printing.

The Monotype Corporation cut Monotype Van Dijck in the late 1930's. It is an especially light and delicate type, designed to thicken slightly in weight with letterpress impression. The origins of this type are attributed to the leading Dutch punchcutter and typefounder of the mid-seventeenth century, Christoffel Van Dijck. The Monotype cutting, however, is considered to be more of an interpretation of Van Dijck's letters rather than a facsimile. Van Dijck appears best when set and handled with traditional typographic principles of design.

The first printed types were blackletter faces that evolved from Carolingian minuscule script, so-named for its use by the Emperor Charlemagne as a standard for writing during the Carolingian Renaissance. The version of Cloister Black used in this broadside is a 1904 variant of Morris Fuller Benton's Cloister Old style produced by the American Type Founder Company in 1897.

The type was composed and the broadside was printed at the Press and Letterfoundry of Michael and Winifred Bixler in Skaneateles, New York. Few shops with such masterful technical perfection and artistic excellence in the art of metal composition such as the Bixler's still exist. Their shop is devoted to the book arts, particularly to the craft of fine letterpress printing and traditional book typography. Over the past thirty years the Bixler's have assembled an extensive collection of classic English Monotype book typefaces. Their work has been sought after by a long list of outstanding institutions, commercial companies, book publishers, and fine book designers including Barry Moser of the Pennyroyal Press, Whitney Museum of American Art, Harvard University, the National Gallery of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New York Public Library, the Julliard School of Music, and the Limited Editions Club.

Alexander Hamilton's contribution to the financial system of the United States is represented in the creation of the Hamilton Conference trademark. The mark consists of Hamilton's signature, redrawn digitally, along with a modern representation of the eagle found on the 1792 U.S. five dollar gold coin. The product is a beautiful marriage of two innovative technologies separated by hundreds of years of time. The mark was designed with Adobe Illustrator software on a Macintosh computer and then produced as a magnesium die for letterpress printing. The color of the ink used in printing the logo was hand-mixed specifically for this broadside and is traditional to the period.

For more information on the art of fine printing and its' history, contact an academic or public library near you. Libraries have been instrumental in protecting the printing arts, their history, and in supporting the modern book artist.